

The Real Causes of America's Wars, Lecture 2

The Spanish-American War

Traditional American Foreign Policy

- Why are we talking about the Spanish-American War? It lasted only 10 weeks. But it raises an important issue.
- Did the Spanish-American War depart from traditional American foreign policy?
- Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation*, claims that it didn't. He points out that from the beginning of America's history, we have been an expansionist nation.

Kagan's Argument

- Under the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, the US took over the whole American continent. The Mexican War (1846-1848) showed that America was willing to use force to do this.
- In the Spanish-American War, Cuba became a virtual US protectorate.
- Suggestions to take over Cuba were common in the 19th century. E.g., some people wanted to extend slavery there.
- Further, the Monroe Doctrine (1823), identifies all of Latin America as our sphere of

Kagan's Argument Continued

- Kagan adds that America has always had an idealistic strain in its foreign policy.
- 19th century Americas sympathized with the Greek independence movement in the 1820s and with the Hungarian revolution of 1848-49.
- America's policy in the Spanish-American War continued this emphasis. We sympathized with the Cuban people, who were harshly treated by the Spanish.

What Was the Traditional American Policy?

- I'll be arguing that Kagan's thesis is wrong. The Spanish-American War *did* break with traditional American policy.
- The best account of traditional American policy is contained in Washington's Farewell Address. The Address wasn't an actual speech but was published in a newspaper , *The American Daily Advertiser*, in 1796.

The Heart of the Address

- The key part of the Address for our purposes is this:
- “The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible. So far as we have already formed engagements, let them be fulfilled with perfect good faith. Here let us stop. Europe has a set of primary interests which to us have none; or a very remote relation.

Quotation Continued

- Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns.

Hence, therefore, it must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves by artificial ties in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities

Still More Quotation

- Our detached and distant situation invites and enables us to pursue a different course. If we remain one people under an efficient government. the period is not far off when we may defy material injury from external annoyance; when we may take such an attitude as will cause the neutrality we may at any time resolve upon to be scrupulously respected; when belligerent nations, under the impossibility of making acquisitions upon us, will not lightly hazard the giving us

Quotation Concluded

- Why forego the advantages of so peculiar a situation? Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground? Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalship, interest, humor or caprice?”

The Farewell Address and the Spanish-American War

- You might think that the Farewell Address has nothing to do with the war. It doesn't mention going to war over Cuba.
- But the key point is that it says we will avoid involvement in European power politics. We will not attempt to become a world power.
- Until 1898, we followed this policy. The Spanish-American War broke with Washington's principle because the US was, especially with taking the Philippines, involved in imperialist rivalries with the

Objections and Replies

- You might think that the War of 1812 was an exception: wasn't the US at war with Britain? Yes, but this was a war against British interference with our trade and sailors and aimed at conquest of Canada. It was *not* an attempt to intervene in European politics.
- Kagan says that Washington intended his policy to be temporary. America would stay out of world politics until it became stronger. But this isn't what Washington said.

The Monroe Doctrine

- Supporters of the War appealed to another famous guideline for American foreign policy, the Monroe Doctrine. (1823) They said that this established that the US was the dominant power in the Americas. Europeans were no longer free to colonize in the Americas
- The Polk Corollary (1845) made this even clearer. Polk said that considerations of the European balance of power have no application to the Americas. This was in response to a French statement that it was

What's Wrong with the Argument

- The Monroe Doctrine can't be used to claim the Spanish-American War was in accord with traditional American policy.
- The Monroe Doctrine did *not* apply to European colonies that already existed. Thus, it couldn't be invoked to demand Cuban independence.
- Also, Monroe reaffirmed that the US did not want involvement in European politics.

Cuban Independence Movement

- In Cuba, there had been a 10 year war for independence that ended unsuccessfully in 1878.
- Cuban grievances included too much profits going to the Spanish government, preference for Spaniards, and slavery (abolished 1886)
- Some but not all of the Cubans favored closer ties with the US. There were Americans, e.g., James G. Blaine (Secretary of State under Garfield, Arthur, and Harrison) who wanted to

Rebellion of 1895

- A new revolt broke out in 1895. This was led by Jose Marti, a noted writer, and on the military side by Maximo Gomez. A Polish military man who had lived in the US, General Carlos Roloff, was also important.
- The rebellion aimed to end the dominance of the planter class and promote equality for blacks. Marti was also opposed to US dominance, but he was killed in battle in 1895.

Spanish Reaction to the Revolt

- Spain regarded Cuba as integral to its Empire. It wasn't regarded as a colony but as a part of Spain.
- The Prime Minister of Spain at the time of the rebellion was Antonio Canovas del Castillo. He was a noted Conservative who played a main role in the restoration of the Bourbon dynasty to rule in Spain.
- He thought that preservation of the Spanish Empire was essential. Spain needed to retain at least some of its possessions in order to

Spanish Reaction Continued

- Canovas accordingly was anxious to end the revolt.
- His first choice for general in Cuba, Arsenio Martinez de Campos, had been the victor of the 1878 War. His strategy was to confine the revolt to the Eastern provinces.
- This didn't satisfy Canovas because Havana and other wealthy areas in the West were still in revolt. He replaced Campos.

General Weyler

- The replacement was General Valeriano Weyler. He was known as “Butcher Weyler”. He pursued a policy of “reconcentration”. This meant that the rural population was forced into concentration camps. More than 300,000 were forced into the camps and thousands of them died.
- The British originated the use of concentration camps in the Boer war.
- Weyler was influenced in his tough tactics by General Sherman. Weyler had served as a

American Reaction to Weyler

- Weyler's policies were effective, but they aroused a great deal of angry protest in the US.
- The campaign against Weyler was led by two rival New York newspaper owners, William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer. Their papers gave lurid accounts of Spanish atrocities and urged war. They in part did this to promote newspaper circulation.

Rise of European Imperialism

- Beginning in the 1870s, there was a vast expansion of European empire-building. England led the way, with France not far behind. Italy and Germany were also involved, on a lesser level.
- Some influential Americans thought that the US should get involved in empire-building. Rothbard stressed that some businessmen thought that colonies would offer a market for American goods.

Lodge and Roosevelt

- Two influential Americans who favored imperialism were Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts and Theodore Roosevelt of New York.
- Both of them favored going to war with Spain. Lodge was influenced by racial theories that said the Anglo-Saxon race was rising, and the Latin race declining.

Roosevelt and Mahan

- Roosevelt was influenced by the famous theorist of naval power, Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan.
- Mahan wrote *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* (1890). Mahan stressed the role of sea power in building up British power.
- Roosevelt accepted Mahan's views that sea power was essential to national greatness and that control of naval bases in key locations was needed to achieve sea power.

Prospects for Peace

- Despite the forces for war, the outbreak of war wasn't inevitable. Weyler was replaced in 1897.
- Also, the conservative Canovas was assassinated and his replacement was his perpetual rival, the more liberal Praxedes Sagasta.
- The Spanish, in response to American demands for better treatment for the Cubans, seemed willing to negotiate, although they

The Road to War

- President McKinley, who had been a Union general, was reluctant to get involved in a war.
- In January, 1898, the battleship USS *Maine* was sent from Florida to Havana harbor to protect American interests. The Spanish weren't happy about this.
- On February 9, 1898, the *New York Journal* (Hearst's paper) published a letter from the Spanish Minister to Washington, Enrique Dupuy de Lome, that disparaged McKinley as

Road to War Continued

- On February 15, 1898, the *Maine* blew up. The Hearst and Pulitzer papers immediately claimed the Spanish did it, but this has never been proved.
- McKinley sent a note in March demanding that the Spanish suspend hostilities in Cuba. He threatened war if they didn't.

McKinley's War Message

- In April, McKinley asked Congress for a declaration of war, because the Spanish hadn't met his demands. In the last few lines of his speech, he had to admit the Spanish *had* met his terms.
- “Yesterday, and since the preparation of the foregoing message, official information was received by me that the latest decree of the queen regent of Spain directs General Blanco, in order to prepare and facilitate peace, to proclaim a suspension of hostilities,

American Imperialism

- Once war started, Theodore Roosevelt, who was assistant secretary of the navy, directed Admiral Thomas Dewey to seize Manila Harbor.
- At first the American cooperated with the Philippine independence movement led by Aguinaldo. Later they refused to turn over the government to the Filipinos, and a lengthy guerilla war against them resulted.
- The Americans conducted the war in a brutal fashion. Many people were killed and